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ABSTRACT

Two distinct school improvement efforts have been undertaken simultaneously in Washington State's North Kitsap School District. One effort focuses on achieving articulation of the curriculum throughout the district's four elementary schools, middle school, and high school. A needs assessment survey revealed that even within individual schools teachers were not utilizing a unified scope and sequence of instruction. In May 1984 a districtwide Reading Subject Review Committee was established to make recommendations in reading instruction, the first area to be improved. The district's other major improvement effort involved implementing a local-school-oriented process developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. This model for school improvement incorporates collecting data on student performance, setting goals on the basis of these data, and selecting and implementing research-based effective schooling practices to meet the goals. Following training of administrators and selection of the individual schools' improvement teams, each school established its own goals and implemented improvement strategies. Despite fiscal difficulties, the district's improvement program has resulted in increased awareness and a commitment to continued effort. (PGD)

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Coordinated Efforts Focus on School Improvement in North Kitsap School District

For over two years, the North Kitsap School District in Poulsbo, Washington, has worked to put into effect coordinated districtwide school improvement processes. Two major efforts have been involved: one a school level process to set and meet local school improvement goals and the other a coordinated effort to institute a districtwide cycle of curriculum review and revision.

The district, located across Puget Sound from Seattle on the Kitsap Peninsula, serves approximately 4,400 students who attend four elementary, one middle and one high schools. District boundaries encompass 110 square miles and eight small communities, each with its own strong local identity. Students come from families associated with three major U.S. military installations; from two separate Indian tribes both with reservations within the district (over 200 Indian students); and from many professional families with parents working in Seattle or in the growing high-tech industries now locating in the area. Overall, the socio-economic status of students in the district is climbing, and there is a very high employment rate in the area.

The North Kitsap School District has faced severe fiscal problems for several years. While the district has been undergoing a tremendous increase in student populations, there has been little funding support from the community. Between 1971 and 1984, only three levies for operations and maintenance in the district have passed, the latest in 1984 for a two-year period through the end of the 1985-86 school year. Unlike previous levies, the most recent earmarked two-thirds of the funds for instruction (materials and supplies; staff and curriculum development), and one-third for transportation and maintenance, a reversal of funding percentages in previous levies.

In response to the funding priorities set by voters in passing this levy formula, the district began planning for instructional improvement. First step was to reinstitute in October 1983 the position of Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, a district position which had not been filled for over seven years. The district thus identified a central office staff member to focus on an organized, sequenced, coordinated instructional program.

All six schools in the North Kitsap School District are involved in a double improvement effort.

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District Focus on Curriculum

Among first efforts in the district was the creation of the districtwide Instructional Council. Members include 10 building administrators (principals and assistant principals), five district directors and coordinators (special education, vocational education, etc.) and the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. This group's charge is to focus on curriculum and instruction planning and coordination.

During the 1983-84 school year, the Instructional Council undertook a needs assessment of all teachers in the district to discover curriculum practices, resources and needs. Each school administrator was responsible for collecting information from the school's teachers via questionnaire and all staff members were informed that results of the survey would be used to focus districtwide curriculum improvement efforts. Data were collected in each building, for every subject at each grade level. This information was then compiled into "needs assessment books" and organized by subject and grade level to serve as a description of current instructional practice and needs in the district.

The data indicated the district faced a major effort to improve the curriculum. There was no organized scope and sequence of instruction in the district, and teachers often taught from different texts with no centralized content being across the district. In a single elementary school, for example, the three fourth grade teachers might all be using different math texts and following different timelines. Consequently, there was no assurance that all students even in the same school at the same grade level were taught the same instructional content. Not surprisingly, there were wide variances in achievement levels for North Kitsap students.

Subject Committees Begin Review

General consensus throughout the district was that a coordinated, articulated K-12 reading approach was the highest priority. In May 1984, a districtwide "Reading Subject Review Committee" was formed to include a faculty member from each school and one administrator from the Instructional Council who would serve as liaison to the district Department of Instructional Services. This committee's charge was to review current instructional practice and materials and make a firm recommendation for reading texts to be adopted districtwide for K-6, 7 -8 and high school. Additional research and planning for the high school section of the district's coordinated reading program would be done by high school teachers; and middle school teachers would be the primary group to address the middle school program. This was the first time a districtwide effort was undertaken to create an articulated curriculum and would be the prototype for further curriculum work as the district began to move toward the establishment of a curriculum improvement cycle.

During the following school year, "subject review committees" were formed in each subject area of the curriculum, with representation patterned after the Reading committee. Teachers and administrators began to examine the current curriculum and instructional practice to determine where improvement priorities lay. Currently, 15 committees are meeting regularly and beginning work that will culminate in further textbook adoptions and a clearer focus on shared instructional priorities throughout the district. As revisions take place, student learning objectives will be identified to guide textbook selection into alignment with the curriculum.

Local School Improvements Begun

As the district worked to establish a cycle of curriculum improvement, a second effort was begun to create ongoing improvements at each of the six district schools. During the 1983-84 school year, the Instructional Council began examining a number of improvement models to identify one which would serve district needs. In January 1984 the district selected the research-based, local-school-oriented improvement process developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. This process focuses on school improvements based on student performance data, goal setting in areas of priority need defined by this data, and planning and implementation of effective schooling practices derived from educational research to meet the schoolwide improvement goal. The process is managed by a school team including the principal and key teachers and with district office support.

From January through August, the district focused on involving building administrators in the school-based improvement effort. In April, consultants oriented principals to the effective schooling research base and led discussions of the interactive roles of board, district office, school administrators and staff. In June, administrators met for two days to examine the research base more closely and to learn the improvement process model.

In August 1984, a final workshop prepared administrators to select the individual staff members who would serve on building leadership teams to manage improvement efforts. To avoid

misunderstandings about the new districtwide approach, the president of the local teachers' organization was included in this workshop. To supplement workshops and meetings, administrators received from the central office research articles and information about other school and district improvement efforts. During meetings, administrators took part in extensive discussion about the double effort in the district.

The district Board of Directors had also been receiving information about the district improvement efforts through regular presentations by the Instructional Council. In August, the Council drafted a district mission statement which was adopted as district policy by the Board in October:

> WHEREAS, the North Kitsap School District has begun a continuing districtwide process aimed at achieving excellence in our schools and based on the belief that all students can learn;
>
> NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Board of Directors approves the following statement of intent signifying district support:
>
> EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING PROJECT--STATEMENT OF INTENT "MAKING OUR SCHOOLS EVEN BETTER"
>
> > The North Kitsap School District has good schools, but we can become even better. It is our goal that every child can make even more improvement. Our mission is to implement an ongoing districtwide process for increasing student achievement and improving behavior in which all students, parents, staff and community people participate. We will use the most effective practices found throughout the United States. This is the number one priority of the North Kitsap School District.

With this action, the Board officially recognized improvement efforts and established their high priority. This policy has been powerful in helping the Board, and the district, maintain focus on improvement in the face of other major issues.

School Involvement Grows

In October of 1984, school leadership teams were trained in the process and began work to collect student performance data, to work with staffs to identify improvement goals and to create plans for implementing research-based improvements. This work continued throughout the 1984-85 school year, and by May of 1985, each school had identified a goal and completed planning for implementation to begin in the fall of 1985.

All schools are now working to implement their plans for reaching improvement goals. The variety of those goals reflects the needs of students as identified at each school by staff and administrators, led by the leadership teams:

- Increase student scores on math achievement tests (elementary)
- Increase student reading scores (elementary)
- Increase student language arts scores (elementary)
- Demonstrated student knowledge and understanding of school rules (elementary)
- Improve student involvement in learning activities (middle school)
- Improve student study skills (high school).

Meanwhile, the Instructional Council served as a clearinghouse for information about improvement work across the district. At each meeting, building administrators reported ideas, activities, successes and problem areas on a school-by-school basis for discussion and to generate new approaches. This provided district building administrators with the opportunity to compare notes and discuss improvement options and kept the district office informed about individual school's progress. Based on these discussions, the district arranged for consultants to meet with each school leadership team at the end of the school year to critique, solve problems, assess progress and refocus on goals and activities for the upcoming year.

In August 1985, the district reconfirmed its commitment to school improvement, acknowledging that the 1984-85 school year had been spent learning the process for local-school managed change and that the 1985-86 school year would be dedicated to putting improvement implementation plans into operation. The Assistant Superintendent met in individual conferences with building administrators to identify needs for resources to support each school's efforts. District funds were identified for such activities as inservice sessions related to goals, conferences that would assist teams and staff, consultants and other areas. Although limited, district resources would be allocated to support the local school goals.

In supporting individual school improvement work, the district hopes to make appropriate inservices available to staff. These staff members, in turn, will bring back new expertise which can then be shared with other staff in the district. This approach will increase the resources available to all schools for meeting their improvement goals.

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Mike Perry notes that school requests for district support reflect a change in approach. During the first year, requests were for activities that would involve one or two members of a school staff; this year, requests are focusing on activities that would be valuable to the entire staff at a single local school.

Further District Efforts

As individual schools move toward meeting improvement goals, work to improve the districtwide curriculum continues. Two efforts involve the Marine Science Center located in the district and operated by the Regional Education Service District. The Center has in the past provided classes and presentations for both students and teachers. With the district Science Subject Review Committee, the Center will be involved in a cooperative effort to develop a K-6 science curriculum for all North Kitsap elementary schools, using marine science as a unifier. In addition, the district Computer Science Committee is leading planning to arrange a combined effort using Center, district office and ESD resources to create a traveling microcomputer laboratory which will take 15-20 microcomputers from school to school for computer classes.

The selection of textbooks for the K-6 reading program will be completed before the end of 1985, with final selection to be made by vote of all teachers in the district. Those texts will be purchased for all elementary schools in the district and all teachers will then adopt them in their classrooms. This will mark the first major districtwide curriculum adoption, and it is the first time that all district teachers have been involved in a curriculum decision making process.

Meanwhile, the Language Arts subject review committee is gearing up to address the next major area in the curriculum review and revision cycle. Following procedures piloted in Reading, the committee will review current instructional practice and identified needs, explore options, recommend finalists, discuss recommendations with all teachers and organize a teacher vote on the texts. The district plan is to build a five-year improvement plan, with subject review committees spending five years per subject in a curriculum review and adoption cycle, with one or two areas revised each year.

In a related but separate effort, the district is also developing an innovative program to increase student achievement through the combining of funding from several categorically-funded programs with basic education monies to create one unified, coordinated remedial program in basic education. From five funding sources (two federal programs, two state programs and district basic education funds) the district is developing a unified approach with coordinated funding and staffing to allocate assistance to students at each school.

Central Office Commitment

The North Kitsap School District has spent the last two years exploring ways to increase ties between the district office and schools to improve student performance. There is increased awareness throughout the district that the central office is committed to school improvement, supported by the Board action to make improvement the number one district priority. At the building level, administrators have increased their awareness of the broad base of research information available for school improvement, and school staffs have begun to see that collegial work and joint decision making can have a positive impact on the effectiveness of their schools. Above all, communications betweeen central office and schools, and internally among staff and administrators, have improved as joint efforts begin to make inroads on school improvement goals.

The district will soon begin a large-scale community outreach effort to involve principals, leadership teams and interested staff members in carrying the message of school improvement to the general community. Setting the stage, the district has instituted a bimonthly newsletter sent to all box holders along the rural routes serving the widely dispersed population. Plans include contact with service and other community groups in the independent communities included within district boundaries, following up the series of presentations made to parent groups in each school in 1984.

The North Kitsap School District has undertaken two major efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities offered to and student performance among a highly diverse student population. Despite fiscal difficulties, the district is fully committed to school improvement and, through districtwide curriculum planning and school-level goal setting, efforts will continue to make North Kitsap schools more effective.

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